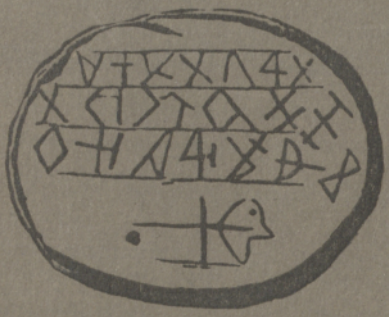
THE GRAVE CREEK MOUND

A MONOGRAPH

BY ANDREW PRICE

President West Virginia Historical Society
Member West Virginia Academy of Science



TIMES BOOK COMPANY
Marlinton, W. Va., U. S. A.

1928

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For many years, the cone at Moundsville, West Virginia, has awakened the curiosity of the scien tific world. It is the largest monument in the United States. It is one of those notable things that has to be seen to be appreciated as is the case with every thing in which size is the main elemeut. This is true of the Niagra Falls, of the Natural Bridge, and of the Pyramids.

It is in the heart of the city and occupies a city block. It is symmetrical and comes up out of the flat surrounding country in an impressive manner and from the top a view is had over the roofs of the houses and across the Ohio River and all of the surrounding country. On the side of the tumulus there are magnificent forest trees big enough to make saw logs. A winding path offers easy access to the top which is flat. The mound is about eighty feet high, and nine hundred feet in circumference at the base.

On the occasion of my recent visit there it was in my mind to locate the place from where the earth came that built up this artificial mountain but I did not see such a place until I was on the point of leaving the town when I drove by a bend in the creek and there was a great scooped out place by which the creek was creeping that corresponded to the kind of place I had hoped to find. This place in a direct line is from a quarter to a third of a mile from the tumulus. I am reliably informed that the general opinion of experts is that this has been formed by the flood and that it is just a place to collect back water from the creek which enters the river at this place.

It does not look like a washout to me. It looks like a barrow-pit, and you cannot have a barrow without a barrow-pit very well. It was a great comfort to see that the barrow-pit was big enough to account for the presence of the barrow, and while the mound is pre-historic in a sense, yet at the same time, in 1775, a tradition was prevalent among the Indians that it marked the site of a great battle.

As is well known, at the time of the advent of the white man in America, the Indian tribes had the most remarkable literature that ever depended upon word of mouth transmission, and that traditions were kept intact generation after generation.

The barrow pit denotes too that this mound was built speedily and was not the slow work of years as is the case with the pyramids which are supposed to be accounted for as affording employment for the common people in these times of financial depression. Taking the cubic contents of the mound as 1,870,000 cubic feet, this would represent about 70,000 days labor by an aborigine, working without the aid of modern tools. It would not be a very big day's work for an Indian to scoop up and carry one cubic yard of loose earth in a day. This is equivalent to one cart load. A thousand hands could build this mound in a part of one summer. There is no sign of rock work in the mound but the whole is composed of loose loam soil such as is found on the rich bottoms by the Ohio River.

About the time that Hector was a pup, a powerful confederacy of Indian tribes inhabited the country now given over to the Ohians, and West Virginians, under the general name of Attiwandaronks, which loosely interpreted means The Scum.

This great nation had grown rich and populous and had their chief city where the city of Moundsville is

now located. The name of this city is lost in antiquity but for short we will call it the city of Attiouendaran-khronon, hereinafter referred to as A. This city was in a rich plain much given to corn raising and other supplies for the inhabitants. It got too big for a palisade and the warriors depended upon look out places on the the bold bluffs surrounding the broad valley on all sides and the city greatly prospered.

One of the northwestern members of the confederacy, so far away that they had lost touch and sympathy with the effete east, were the Muscoutens, a lot of fighting fools. They kept their arms bright and trained their young men to war and sent their old men to the legislature at A, and about the time when Hector was young a dispute arose between the nation and the native state of the Muscoutens.

The principal chief of the Muscoutens, one Ishkote, had gone to A to sit in the committee of the whole on the state of the union, and had taken with him his young son, Assegun to bear him company, together with a small bodyguard, leaving his oldest son, Muskuta, (The Fox,) to rule over the Muscoutens in his absence. When the delegation arrived in the city and had made camp in a convenient place, and Ishkote had taken up his legistive duties, in the palace, the young Muscoutens took in the wonders of the town. They saw log and bark houses one hundred and fifty feet long, and fifteen feet wide, with shelves running down the sides full width, and with a passage way down the middle where the clan that inhabited the house lived and did their cooking. These magnificent houses were there in the greatest number for some twenty thousand Indians lived at the place.

Assegun had never seen a city before. He had never seen a crowded place. It was new and strange to

him. He was a noble gambler and had all the instincts of a gentleman. A gamble was a matter of honor with him, and he fell in with a gambling crowd and lost considerable fur and other emblems of wealth. The game was crooked. It was not until he had lost his most valuable possession, a jewel of a knife, that he discovered that the cards had been stacked on him, and he sought to recover the stake, and in the dispute that followed some one brained him with a dolo mite hammer, and he expired.

Ishkote was greatly distressed and complained to the king, one Ritka, that Assegun had been killed in a gambling hell, and the King was very much perturbed about it, and promised that the guilty gang should immediately accompany Assegun to the Happy Hunting Ground. But unfortunately when Ritka looked into the matter it was discovered that the hand that had held the fatal tool was no other than the dissolute son of the King and nothing could be done about it. Ishkote desiring vengeance attempted to assassinate the city slicker and was himself slain in the attempt. All told, it was a bad affair.

The faithful Muscoutens hid away the bodies of Ishkote and Assegun and made a bee line to their home country up in the Michigan penninsular, and told Muskuta, the Fox.

Muskuta swore by all that was good and bad that he never had liked that city crowd anyway and that they would pay for the deaths of his father and his brother in a way that would be forever remembered.

So he assembled an army of some four thousand warriors and one day he appeared before the capital city and demanded its surrender. The look-outs had seen the war party and had aroused the city, and the city was put in a state of defense, but the home guards had never been in a fight and they broke and ran directly The Fox entered the city and had

Ritka and the bad boy before him, and he was not slow in whacking them over the head with his war-club or tomahawk, and they promptly passed out.

Most of the inhabitants of the town had fled. There were a lot of prisoners. The Fox had lost a couple hundred of his warriors. But the city with all its richness was his and being something of an administrator he called for the city fathers to come out of the brush and get their orders.

The council being set, some days of oratory followed. The head alderman admitted that The Fox had cause of complaint, but said this statesman: "Guilt is personal. It ought not to attach to the municipality."

"Why, then," said The Fox, "when Muskuta's father and his brother were slain did not the city fathers deal with the guilty ones. Did they not know that Muscoutens were dangerous men to affront."

Besides that being the case, it seemed that there was nothing to do but take over the city as it was getting seedy and corrupt.

Hear then the edict. All the city and the confederacy were to submit to the Muscoutens. One hundred warriors were to join the Muscoutens in the realms of death. All laws and orders of the council were to be submitted for approval to The Fox, who would take up his abode in the palace.

In addition three thousand women were put to work to build a fitting tomb to the great Ishkote, so dreadfully done to death while on a diplomatic mission.

All of which was agreed to.

In the heart of the city a slight mound was to be seen rising about the terrain. On this was placed the tomb of Ishkote. An excavation was made and a room fashioned 12 feet by 8 feet and 7 feet high. The Muscoutens were known as the fire people as

they were versed in the use of fire to shape timbers and this room was timbered on every side and over the top, and many rough stones were placed on the timbers and the captive women commenced the work of building a small mountain over it. In that room were placed the bodies of Ishkote and Assegun and the whole was covered with a layer of earth.

Then were the hundred warriors assembled and were slain with appropriate ceremony. Great quantities of dry wood were brought and the dead bodies of the warriors were imposed in a great funeral pyre on top of the layer of earth that covered the tomb. On a dark night in early summer, in the presence of the captive people, the Muscoutens held their memorial service and the pyre was lighted, and burned fiercely and the base of the mound that was to be was covered with ashes and charred bones.

Then all through the hot days of summer a large body of women worked in the barrow-pit and carried in a never ending stream their baskets of earth and the mound took shape.

When the work had progressed so that it was thirty feet above the surrounding ground, another room was built and timbered and this was reserved for The Fox, himself, when in the fullness of time he was called to be no more.

Hundreds of years after that time a conquering race of people came across the great waters and took possession of the land and upwards of a hundred years ago, they opened the mound and found the skeletons of the chiefs as set forth herein.

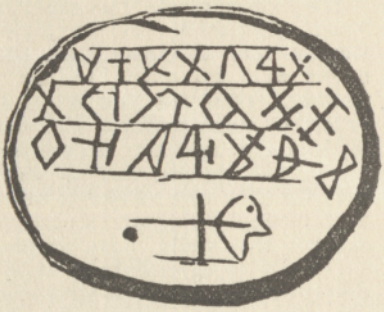
They found in the upper vault an inscribed tablet that has had the attention of every antiquarian and savant of note. The excavation was made in 1838, ninety years ago. The tablet was an oblong round plate about two inches in its greatest dimension. It had 23 characters and a

signature consisting of a bird's head, if it was not meant for a fox. It bore the general likeness of a petroglyph or stone writing. It has been discussed for ninety years continuously and a likeness to Old Word hieroglyphics has been seen by some. One wise man pronounced it a forgery. He probably meant a hoax.

They are so much like the Turkey Track inscription on the John R. Hevener farm at Clover Lick, that it might well stand for Indian sign writing. Thus The Fox might have called the stone writer of the nation to him and told him to prepare a tablet showing the various warriors that the chief had caused to bite the dust during his long and tempestuous career. He would have cautioned the expert to be sure to show by the conventional signs what tribe each of the victims belonged to, the rank of the deceased, and other pertinent facts concerning the victim. This having been done and the tablet delivered with the mark and seal of the emperor on it, it would have been worn by the monarch during life and would have been deposited with the other trinkets such as beads and isinglass in his tomb. The finding of this tablet by the workmen has given rise to much discussion for it was not well established that it was picked up in place. Suffice it to say that if it was a hoax, those whose perpetrated it died without making known the great success of the scheme. It reposes in some famous collection, and it may have passed from hand to hand for a valuable consideration, and if this was the case it would seal the lips of those responsible for the glorious sell.

When Nicholas Creswell visited the Ohio tribes in 1775 as a green young Briton, trying to learn to be an Indian trader, he kept a very extensive diary showing that he was a well educated young man and a close observer. He was able to draw. He

gives a picture of an Indian record which corresponds in the main with the Turkey Track rock, and also with the Moundsville tablet. He had the drawing explained to him by a chief and it dealt mainly with a record of scalps and prisoners taken, and it was signed with the drawing of a turtle.



The Moundsville Tablet

I have never seen the tablet. I have never seen any photograph of it. I have seen a number of drawings and judged them to be free hand drawings as they vary considerably. Henry Howe noticed this too and about the year 1843 he went to Moundsville and made a wax cast of it from which he had an engraving made. This is the cut that I consider most authentic. I have studied this drawing for upwards of fifty years, but did not attempt to decipher it until the other day. Some time after I had prowled around Moundsville looking for the barrow-pit, and when I was imagining Ishkote (the Fire) and Muskuta (the Fox,) and trying to evolve a probable cause for the big tumulus from the meagre facts and the physical existence, I conceived a new test for the tablet, and I hunted up a number of alphabets including Hieroglyphic, Hieratic, Babylonian cuneiform, Semitic, Phoenician, Greek, Hebrew, and Roman and set down to draw a far fetched conclusions.

The figures on the tablet are in three rows divided by hair lines. The figures run together in some instances above and below these lines, and I discovered afterwards that this was one of the keys.

Before I started to compare the alphabets with the markings I glanced at the page of the book containing the tablet which lay face upward on a chair some feet away, and it seemed that the last line was "Oct 14 1838." I soon became convinced that this was a fact and as that was the year the tablet was discovered, I put the alphabets back in the book case and tried to read it in good old West Virginian. The next word above it reads "stone" The next word reading from the bottom of the page upward was illegible but the first word was plainly "Bil", and all of a sudden the true reading came to me. It is: BIL STUMPS STONE OCT 14 1838.

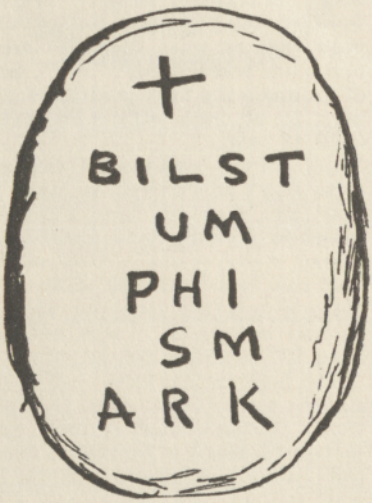
Let all the experts in the world come and I will accept no other form but that. I do not have a cut of the tablet to go with this article and I cannot reason it any further with you And you will have to take Henry Howe's accurate drawing to follow me and he took it in wax before the stone left Moundsville, in 1843.

The hoax would have had a great significance in 1838. The year before 1837, Dicken's star showed like a meteor in English literature through the desultory publication of the Pickwick Papers. In those days a little wit went a long way and his chapters were the talk of every town on both sides of the ocean. I saw a copy the other day in a bookstore and the mer chant was wondering whether to mark it as a new novel or one that had been reprinted. Pickwick Papers had a chapter about Mr. Pickwick discovering a stone with a fragment of an inscription. It was by an ancient cottage and he got it for ten shillings and it was the subject of

endless debate among the learned. All that could be made out was the following:

X
BILST
U M
PSHI
S. M.
ARK

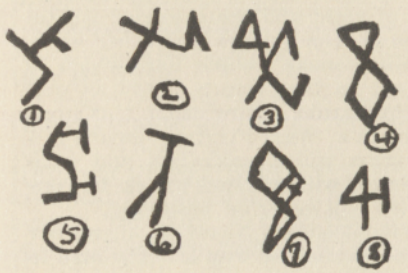
No body could read it but Mr. Pickwick was elected to seventeen native and foreign societies. Then an ass by the name of Blotton said that the rock was ancient but the inscription was not. It read BILL STU PS HIS MARK. Dickens had a reader in Moundsville and he improved his occasion.



Bill Stump, His Mark

I have before me as I write three engravings of the Moundsville stone. The Smithsonian cut, the cut in Virgil A. Lewis's West Virginia History for public schools, and the Howe replica. Not one of them agree in important details with any other. The reading of the puzzle depends upon the deciphering of the monograms which are to be found extend

ing across the lines. The others make each line distinct. I am probably the first type-setter who ever tried to read it. Typesetters must be able to read anything.



Eight Monograms: 1. LS; 2.TU; 3. N; 4. PO; 5. SC; 6. T1; 7. O8; 8. 41.

To show the extent that the learned have been bamboozled for nearly a century by the practical joker, hear what Virgil A. Lewis has to say about it:

"This stone was found in the Mammoth Mound in 1838. The inscription is in unknown characters, resembling those used by the Scandanavian priests before the introduction of the Roman alphabet. It has never been deciphered and nothing like it has ever been found in America. It has attracted more attention from scientists and antiquarians at home and abroad than any other relic found in the United States. The characters are now conceded to be of European origin, and, if this be true, then there is evidence that Europeans visited this continent before the coming of Columbus. But who were they? No reply can be made beyond the fact that they were of those acquainted with some ancient alphabet known and used along the coast and among the islands of the European continent. Powell, the antiquarian says: 'Four of the characters corres-

pond to the ancient Greek, four to the Etruscan, five to the Norse, six to the Gaelic, seven to the old Erse, and ten to the Phoenician.' Certain it is that these characters were those of the ancient rock alphabet consisting of right and acute angled strokes used by the Pelasgi and other early Mediterranean people and which is parent of the modern Runic as well rs the Bardic. How came this stone to be in a West Virginia mound is a question which scientists and antiquarians will continue to ask, but one which will never be answered.''

Fiddlededee! Never be answered? The Dickens it won't! The man to answer it is a man who has read the Dickens books at least twenty times; who sets type from illegible manuscripts for years; and who is an unworthy member of the Academy of Science. Hooray for Bill Stump's stone.

I have before me too the picture of the stone in Powell's History of Marshall county, page 308. This cut differs from the other cuts but is more nearly right than any except Howe's who took an impression. The mystification depends upon no less than eight monograms, and Powell shows the figures extending across the line.

The stone has been the subject of study and debate in every civilized country.

Since the commencement of this monograph I have had a meeting with Dr Roy B Cook and Hon. Boyd B. Stutler, of Charleston, eminent antiquarians, who will probably take the matter up in writing at an early date. I have also had engravings made of the stone and other matters including a set of eight monograms. As the interpretation of the stone came to me in the course of preparing a light article of the bull-dog type I have decided to let it stand. Later on I may give you some of the readings made by scientific men all serious ranging from a declaratian that this

is the farthest east to a declaration that the owner of the stone had been assassinated and calling for vengeance "Ebslatrom ew sloof tahw!"

Honorable Andrew Price,
President, West Virginia
Historical Society,
Marlinton, West Virginia
Dear Mr. Price:

I notice that the mound at Mounds ville was opened in March, 1838, but the day is not given. This is in the History of the Pan-Handle which you examined last Saturday. I am sending you this date so that you will have it when you write your article on the stone. I can locate nothing of significance so far concerning the date, October 14th.

I am writing this in a hurry as to avoid any error regarding the time the stone was found. The more I study the matter the more I am inclined toward your explanation.

Very truly yours,
Clifford R. Myers
State Historian and Archivist

It is important that the date of the opening of the Mound was in 1838. It is not important as to the date on the stone except that it was not prior to 1838. If it is a hoax it would not have been found when the mound was opened in place. The date is uncertain like the year that the cat was belled.

APPENDIX

An inscribed stone found in Grave creek mound, near the Ohio river, in 1838, has been the subject of much linguistic contention among persons who admitted its authenticity. Twenty-four characters on it have been considered by various experts to be alphabetic, and one is a supposed hieroglyphic sign. Mr. Schoolcraft says that twenty-two of the characters are alphabetic, but there has been a difference of opinion with regard to their origin. One scholar finds among them four characters which he claims are ancient Greek; another claims that four are Etruscan; five have been said to be Runic; six, ancient Gaelic; seven, old Erse; ten, Phenecian; fourteen, old British; and sixteen, Celtiberic. M. Levy Bing reported at the Congress of Americanists at Nancy, in 1875, that he found in the inscription twenty-three Canaanite letters, and translated it: "What thou sayest, thou dost impose it, thou shinest in thy impetuous clan and rapid chamois." (?) M. Maurice Schwab in 1856 rendered it: "The Chief of Emigration who reached these places (or this island) has fixed these statutes forever." M. Oppert, however, gave additional variety by the translation, so that all tastes can be suited: "The grave of one who was assassinated here. May God to avenge him strike his murderer, cutting off the hand of his existence."

Col. Chas. Whittlesey (a) gives six copies of the Grave creek stone, all purporting to be facsimiles, which have been published and used in the elaborate discussions held upon its significance. Of these, three are here reproduced with Col. Whittlesey's remarks, as follows:

Copy No. 1 is reproduced as Fig. 1285, drawn by Capt. Eastman.

Capt. Seth Eastman was a graduate and teacher of drawing at West

Point. He was an accomplished draftsman and painter detailed by the War Department to furnish the illustrations for "Schoolcraft's Indian Tribes," published by the Government. This copy was made in his official capacity, with the stone before him, and therefore takes the first rank as authority. There are between the lines twenty-two characters, but one is repeated three times and another twice leaving only twenty The figure, if it has any significance, is undoubtedly pictorial.

Copy No. 3, now Fig. 1286, was used by Monsieur Jomard at Paris 1843.

From this copy M. Jomard considered the letters to be Lybian, a language derived from the Phenecian. At the right of the upper line one is omitted and another bears no resemblance to the original. The fifth character of the second line is equally defective and objectionable. The second, fifth, and sixth of the lower line are little better. In the rude profile of a human face beneath an eye has been introduced and the slender cross lines attached to it have assumed the proportions of a dagger or sword. For the linguist or ethnologist this copy is entirely worthless.

Copy No. 4 now Fig. 1287, was sent to Prof. Rafn, Copenhagen, 1843. This is so imperfect and has so many additions that it is little better than a burlesque upon the original. No one will be surprised that the learned Danish antiquarian could find in it no resemblance to the Runic, with which he was thoroughly familiar.

A mere collocation of letters from various alphabets is not an alphabet. Words can not be formed or ideas communicated by that artifice. When a people adopts the alphabetical signs of another it adopts the general style of the characters and more often the characters in detail. Such signs had already an arrangement into syllables

and words which had a vocalic validity as well as known significance. A jumble of letters from a variety of alphabets bears internal evidence that the manipulator did not have an intelligent meaning to convey by them, and did not comprehend the languages from which the letters were selected. In the case of the Grave creek inscription the futile attempts to extract a meaning from it on the theory that it belongs to an intelligent alphabetic system shows that it holds no such place. If it is genuine it must be treated as pictorial and ideographic, unless, indeed, it is cryptographic, which is not indicated.

(Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology—J. W. Powell, Director, 1888-'89) pp. 761 and 762.